

# From Church to State

*The Sectarian Roots  
of Oregon State University, 1868–1888*

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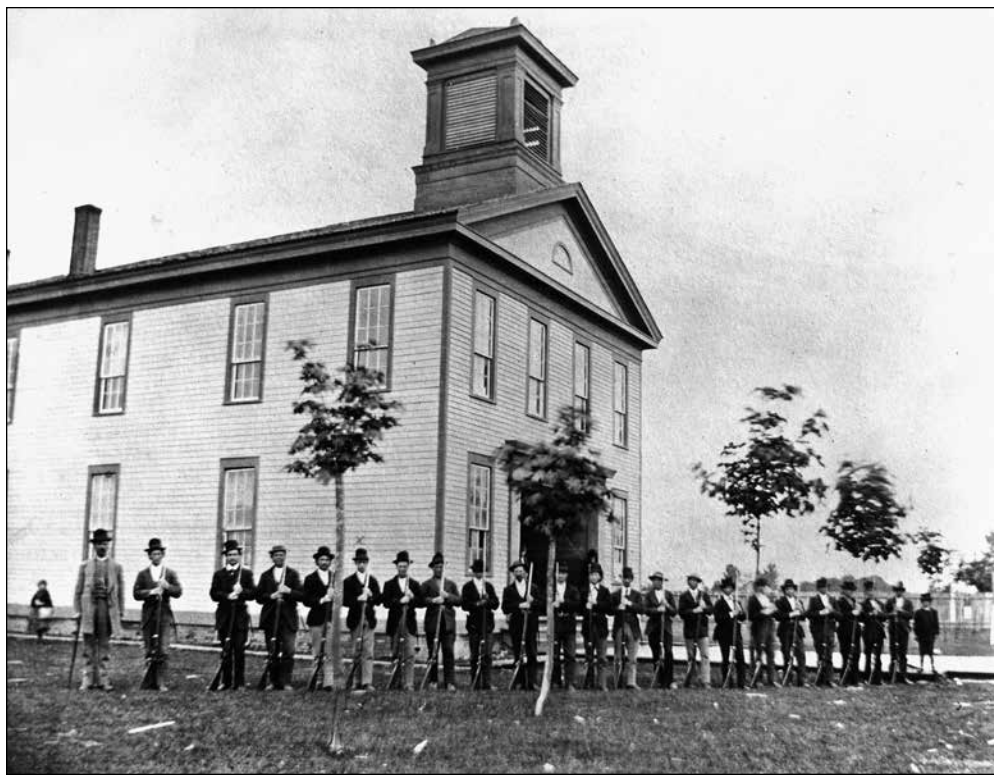
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**AS OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY** prepares to celebrate its sesquicentennial as a land-grant school in 2018, it is important to know something of the institution's founding in 1868, when the Oregon legislature selected sectarian Corvallis College "as the Agricultural College of the State of Oregon." Under the control of the Southern-sympathizing Columbia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the small, struggling academy would be home to the agricultural school until the Oregon legislature took it over in 1885. From that inauspicious beginning, Oregon State University emerged as one of seventy-six land-grant colleges and universities, sixteen of them historically black institutions in the American South designated as land grants in 1890.<sup>1</sup> Today the university is renowned as a land-grant, sea-grant, space-grant, and sun-grant pioneer, all of those designations growing out of the seminal legislation of 1862.

Land-grant schools are rooted in the Morrill Act of 1862, which granted states 30,000 acres of federal land for each U.S. Senator and Representative from the state, to support a college "to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes." When President Abraham Lincoln signed the bill into law, he welcomed the legislation for creating schools of higher education "built on behalf of the people, who have invested in these public universities their hopes, their support, and their confidence." Embedded in the land-grant tradition from its beginning, Oregon State University is part of a proud and distinctively American institution whose seminal mission was to offer instruction in science and classical studies, military tactics, and "agriculture and the mechanic arts." That grand educational enterprise was especially suited to an industrializing nation interested in offering an education to the working classes.<sup>2</sup>

Absent the seceded states, the U.S. Congress passed two related pieces of legislation in 1862 — the Homestead Act and the Pacific Railway Act —



**A NEWLY FORMED** cadet corps stands in front of the Corvallis College Building in about 1873. President Benjamin Arnold established the corps soon after he assumed the presidency in 1872.

whose purpose, with the Morrill Act, was to promote the development of the American West. Because the Morrill Bill was enacted amid the exigencies of war, the measure prohibited disloyal states from participating and required land-grant schools to offer training in “military tactics” to provide officers for the Union Army. Although the Oregon legislature filed notice to accept the Morrill Act’s provisions in 1863, lawmakers deferred selecting a location for the land-grant school until 1868, when they designated Corvallis College as home to Oregon’s agricultural institution. Historian Roger Geiger observes that the development of land-grant schools into legitimate universities was “a long and arduous process with many pitfalls.”<sup>3</sup> Future events clearly demonstrate that the designation of Corvallis College as Oregon’s agricultural institution was fraught with controversy.

Oregon’s political origins were deeply embedded in the slavery controversy and the Civil War. Granted statehood on the eve of the conflict,

Oregon's (all-white, all-male) voters were divided when they went to the polls in the presidential election of 1860. Pro-slavery, states' rights Democratic candidate John Breckenridge received 5,074 votes, popular-sovereignty Democrat Stephen A. Douglas garnered 4,131 ballots, and Abraham Lincoln at the head of the new Republican Party tallied 5,344 votes. With similar divisions prevailing across the nation, Lincoln won the presidency with a solid majority in the Electoral College.<sup>4</sup>

The contentious slavery issue had been at play in the small town of Corvallis when Orceneth Fisher, a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, who arrived in the community in 1858, purchased financially troubled Corvallis College in 1860 and transferred the property to the church for use as a meeting house and for college classes. The Corvallis church and its college serve as a reminder that the great schism in America's Methodist Episcopal Church took place well before the Civil War, when the northern delegation to its General Conference demanded that a Georgia bishop give up the vestments of his office when he married a woman who owned large numbers of enslaved people.<sup>5</sup> The General Conference meeting in 1844 led to a "Plan of Separation" and the establishment of two Methodist Episcopal churches, North and South. When the southern churches met the following year, they dissolved the jurisdiction of the General Conference over the slaveholding states and erected a separate ecclesiastical organization, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (M.E. Church, South). The geographical division of the Methodist Episcopal churches lasted until 1939, when they merged to form the Methodist Church. The existence of the M.E. Church, South, in the American West (including in Oregon) reflected white immigrants from slaveholding and border states who followed the trails westward during the 1840s and 1850s to establish white settlements west of the Rocky Mountains.<sup>6</sup>

Few people today are aware of Oregon State's link to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and its oversight body, the Columbia Conference. The sectarian to non-sectarian evolution of Corvallis College to Oregon Agricultural College paralleled the beginnings of land-grant institutions in a few other states. Although land-grant schools have been associated with major state universities in the Midwest and West, such designations in the East were often bestowed — for a time — on private institutions (many of them with sectarian roots), for example, Yale in Connecticut, and most notably, Cornell in New York. A private school from its inception, Cornell had no religious affiliation, but like most of its peers, it provided religious instruction to students. Cornell has remained the permanent home to New York's land-grant school. Yale was founded in 1701 to prepare students for "Publick employment both in Church and Civil State." In the case of its

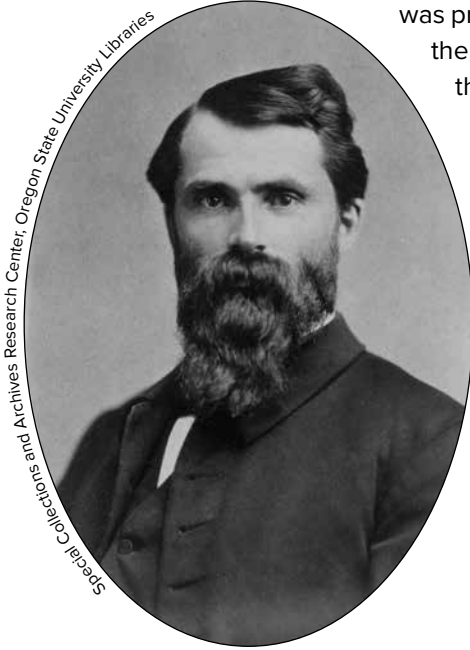
Sheffield Scientific School, Connecticut's land-grant designee, the state legislature subsequently established Storrs Agricultural School in 1881 and transferred its land-grant unit to the Storrs campus in 1893 (later the University of Connecticut). Corvallis College, however, was unique in its link to the M.E. Church, South.<sup>7</sup>

One year after passage of the Morrill Act, the *Portland Oregonian* asked the vexing question: "where shall this institution be located?" What place possessed a healthy location, inexpensive living, easy access to transportation, and a willingness to make a "liberal offer for furnishing a site for the college and college buildings?" The newspaper urged the legislature to act quickly, because "the Farmers and Mechanics of Oregon must not let this great endowment . . . be lost to themselves and their children." The legal stipulations of the Morrill Act required states to accept the grant within two years and to establish a college within five years. The Oregon Legislature filed acceptance within a year, and when it dallied in locating a college, the *Oregonian* complained that Congress had provided a rich endowment for common schools and higher education, "yet legislative and popular action seems to indicate that the gift is not worth receiving."<sup>8</sup>

Fifteen states had acted on their land grants when the Oregon Legislature appointed a committee in 1868 "with power to locate all the lands to which the State is entitled by act of Congress." States were to select their lands from the Public Domain and either lease or sell them to fund their agricultural schools. Those making the selections had to avoid earlier grants for homesteaders, railroads or, in Oregon's case, for military roads. And then, amid considerable opposition and controversy, lawmakers designated Corvallis College as its temporary institution to meet the federal requirement "until other provisions are made." Under the terms of the law, each state senator was to select one student age sixteen or over to attend the college for two years. To meet the terms of the 1862 Morrill Act, the legislature directed that the "act shall take effect from the date of its passage," October 27, 1868.<sup>9</sup>

Endorsing the small Corvallis academy as its interim "agricultural college" was no simple matter, because well-established Willamette University had lobbied for the institutional privilege, agreeing to offer federally required classes "until such time as the state was able to provide an institution." Representative C.B. Bellinger of Benton County played a major role in landing the agricultural college in Corvallis, his efforts involving empathy for the South and a bit of legislative chicanery. Bellinger won a contested election in 1868 to sit in the legislature and then edited the *Albany State's Rights Democrat* from 1869 to 1870. He contributed to a chaotic session

when he led a brilliant move — the *Oregonian* called it a *coup d'état* — to deprive Willamette University of being the state's designated land-grant college. The bill was ready for a third reading (to become law) when Bellinger moved to strike Willamette University and insert Corvallis College in the bill. The measure carried, and Corvallis College became the state's agricultural college designee.<sup>10</sup> Among the dissenters was prominent farmer John Minto, later to become the most significant critic of Corvallis College as the state's agricultural institution.



**WILLIAM A. FINLEY**, the first president of Corvallis College, is pictured here in about 1870. An ordained minister and pastor for the Methodist-Episcopal Church, South, Finley served as president of the college from 1865–1872. He later became president of Pacific Methodist College in California.

Designating the M.E. Church, South's Corvallis College as the state's land-grant school reflected post-Civil War politics in Oregon. With Democrats out of power in 1866, legislators had ratified the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, granting citizenship to all persons born in the United States (including those formerly enslaved) and guaranteeing equal protection under the law. Two years later, with Democrats dominating the legislature, lawmakers assigned the state's agricultural school to Corvallis College and then voted to repeal the Fourteenth Amendment. Opposed vociferously in the Southern states, movements to reject the amendment gained currency in the American West with large numbers of people who had emigrated from Southern and border states.<sup>11</sup> The 1868 legislature's two measures — rescinding its approval of the Fourteenth Amendment and designating a Southern-oriented sectarian school home to its land-grant institution — reflect

a distinctive political tone.

While the Oregon Legislature was moving to designate its land-grant school, the M.E. Church, South, and the Columbia Conference had been struggling financially to support Corvallis College. Meeting in Rickreall in 1867, the conference discussed an appropriate endowment for the college, recommending immediate action "to raise a fund of not less value than \$5,000" for new buildings. The conference later appointed a board of trustees

to oversee the operation. The trustees, most from Corvallis, incorporated the school in August 1868, declaring its name to be “Corvallis College,” whose objective would be “to acquire and hold property in trust for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.”<sup>12</sup>

The Columbia Conference devoted increasing attention to Corvallis College during the late 1860s. President William Finley and Professor of Mathematics Joseph Emery, both ordained ministers and pastors with the M.E. Church, South, regularly attended conference meetings and tendered assessments of the college’s financial health. Conference reports varied between enthusiasm for the college’s “prosperous condition” and decreasing indebtedness, and acknowledgment at the same moment that “our friends at large have not been as fully informed [of the debt] and as a consequence [are] not as fully interested as necessary for future prosperity.” The conference’s September 1869 report expressed fear that the college would never be secure until it had “an endowment fund of at least \$25,000.”<sup>13</sup>

The Corvallis College Board of Trustees took charge of the fiscal and academic activities of the institution in the fall of 1868. The board’s president informed members about the condition of the college and its financial health. The board established annual salaries for Finley (\$1,000) and Emery (\$900) and set the college calendar at three sessions of fourteen weeks’ duration. The board voted in the fall of 1868 to accept the Oregon Legislature’s temporary designation of Corvallis College as home to the agricultural institution, promising “to faithfully carry out the provisions of said act.”<sup>14</sup>

The trustees directed faculty to create a course of study for students in the “Agricultural Department,” acknowledging that the institution’s agricultural component would be part, yet separate from, other activities at the college.<sup>15</sup>



**JOSEPH EMERY**, like Finley, was an ordained minister and earned a Master’s degree from Pacific Methodist College. Emery taught mathematics and other subjects at Corvallis College and was frequently criticized for his sectarian leanings. He left Corvallis College in 1883 to become Indian Agent for the Klamath Reservation.

Early trustees' meetings reveal Columbia Conference requests regarding information about the college's "apparatus fund" — that is, the institution's need for specialized equipment. As further indication of its more important responsibilities, the board authorized hiring staff for its Primary Department (elementary grade levels) and Preparatory Department (high school level), units of the college that were consistent with many other land-grant schools. As the future would indicate, those departments also supplied the majority of the students at Corvallis College. Despite the college's expressed interest in agricultural education, the catalogue for 1868–1869 treated the subject as an afterthought, mentioning only the legislature's designation of the Corvallis school as the "Agricultural College of the State."<sup>16</sup>

The Columbia Conference appointed a commission with power to transact business between sessions to assist the college's agent to secure funds to pay debts. Because of growing interest in the college and "to give it rank among the first Institutions of the land," the conference recommended the need to properly endow the college and raise funds for additional buildings. Its 1870 session observed that the college and its agricultural unit had been successfully operating for three years, evidence "that the Institution is permanent."<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, conference meetings make no mention of the school's agricultural department.

Despite that oversight, the state legislature voted "to permanently locate the Agricultural College of Oregon" with Corvallis College in 1870, and the board of trustees accepted the legislature's provisions. Legislators also appointed a committee to locate the 90,000 acres to which the state was entitled under the Morrill Act. At their meetings, trustees discussed the legislature's powers and the board's responsibilities in "relation to the Agricultural College" and resolved to canvas Benton County citizens to raise money to purchase land for a farm.<sup>18</sup>

Confronting criticism that it offered little in the way of practical agriculture, trustees moved in 1873 to establish an "Agricultural College Farm," to hire "a Practical Farmer," and to furnish the enterprise with proper equipment. In truth, establishing the farm was no simple matter. Although lawmakers designated Corvallis as the location for the agricultural college, they provided no financial support. Benton County legislators and friends, however, pledged to purchase suitable land for a farm, meeting with some success when supporters purchased thirty-five acres for \$4,500 in 1871 and deeded it to the college. The buyers paid \$2,500 and expected to pay off another \$500 through subscriptions. The remaining \$1,500, however, was a problem, placing the property in danger of foreclosure and threatening the viability of the agricultural college. In an advertisement in the *Corvallis Gazette*,

trustees asked citizens “to contribute of your means, not only to liquidate the debt on the land already purchased, but to enable the Regents to increase the Farm to at least One Hundred Acres.”<sup>19</sup>

The prevailing sentiment during Oregon’s early statehood years was to support “common” (public) schools, but to avoid taxing citizens to fund institutions of higher education. According to Frederick G. Young, an early-twentieth-century University of Oregon social scientist, Oregon would have written into its constitution that the university’s grant be used to support common schools if Congress would have approved such a change. Young indicated that the location for the state university went to “the community that showed the highest appreciation.” Over time, Young observed, Oregon legislators grudgingly loosened their purse strings for higher education. Historian John Thelin observes that governors and legislators wanted “to reduce their responsibility for oversight and support for higher education.”<sup>20</sup>

Among the college’s chief critics were the State Agricultural Society and its founding member John Minto, a Salem-area sheep farmer, orchardist, and advocate of progressive farming. Minto edited *Willamette Farmer*, a weekly newspaper devoted to technological advances in farming that frequently criticized Corvallis College for failing to offer instruction in agriculture. When the Corvallis College Board of Trustees sought the Agricultural Society’s support after the college gained permanent status, the society refused, citing the legislature’s decision as “premature,” ill-advised, and beneath the standards of agricultural colleges in other states.<sup>21</sup>

Corvallis and Benton County’s population grew apace during the 1860s, with the county increasing to 4,584 in 1870. Although Corvallis lacked a rail connection to Portland, it had enjoyed steamship service to Portland and points upriver since 1867. Until investors completed the lock and canal at

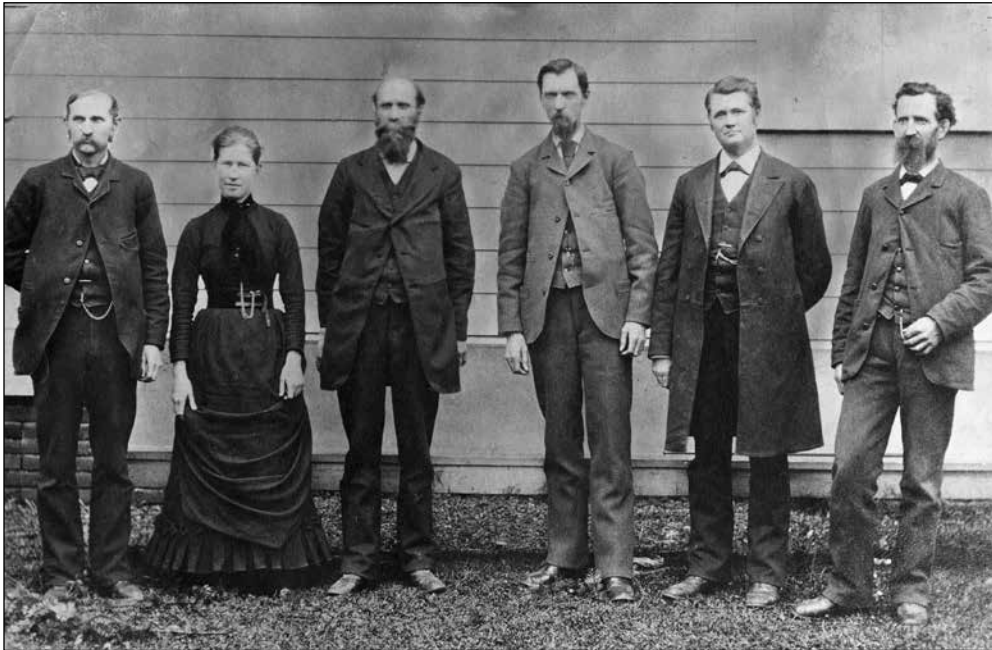


**JOHN MINTO** was a founding member of the Oregon State Agricultural Society, a sheep farmer, orchardist, advocate of progressive farming, and editor of *Willamette Farmer*. He also served in the Oregon Legislature.



Willamette Falls in 1873, upriver and downriver travelers (and goods) were forced to portage around the falls and board another steamship. Although the Oregon and California Railroad linked Portland and Roseburg by 1872 (via Albany), farmers welcomed the canal and locks at Willamette Falls for overcoming the major obstacle to river navigation, making “competition possible” and lowering prices for shipping goods. During the rainy season, steamers made regular departures upriver from Portland to Oregon City, Salem, Albany, Corvallis, and intermediate points.<sup>22</sup>

In the midst of improved transportation links to the outside world, the Columbia Conference of the M.E. Church, South, appointed Benjamin Arnold as the new president of Corvallis College in 1872. Finley left for Santa Rosa, California, where he later served as president of Pacific Methodist College. Arnold, a Virginian educated at Randolph Macon College who served in the Confederate Army under General Robert E. Lee, assumed the presidency after a brief interlude with Joseph Emery as acting president. Although the documented record is sparse, Arnold, who was not an ordained minister, surfaced as president through the auspices of the M.E.



**THE OREGON AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE** faculty is pictured here in 1883. From left to right are: E.E. Grim, professor of agriculture; Ida Callahan, Assistant in the Preparatory Department; President Benjamin Arnold; B.J. Hawthorne, professor of languages; Joseph Emery, professor of mathematics and natural sciences; and W.W. Briston, principal of the Preparatory Department.

Church, South, and served until his death in 1892. In board of trustees records, he is described as a person of integrity and an honest broker for the needs of Corvallis College and its agricultural department. While he lacked expertise, Arnold was willing to venture into the world of agricultural experimentation, with some of his efforts ridiculed in the *Willamette Farmer*.<sup>23</sup>

Emery had submitted the first “Biennial Report of the Trustees of the State Agricultural College” to the governor in August 1872, reporting that students were being “instructed, as far as practicable” to comply with federal legislation. He cited the purchase of “an experimental farm” with a house, barn, and orchard, and applauded the institution’s emphasis on “practical agriculture.” The college employed two professors to teach its classes and to “meet its imperative demands,” expenses far exceeding the state’s contribution. Emery requested and was awarded a legislative appropriation of \$5,000 for the biennium to meet instructional demands and to stock the farm with animals and agricultural implements.<sup>24</sup>

Corvallis College graduated its first three students in 1870 with bachelor of science degrees, two men and one woman. Taught within the Department of Chemistry, the agricultural curriculum enrolled twenty-five students from eleven Oregon counties, all appointed by state senators (as mandated by federal law). Because many students were ill-prepared for academic work, they soon left campus in sizable numbers. The board of trustees, however, focused on other matters, engaging in a rueful repetitiveness during the early 1870s — with members wondering what “amount would be necessary to secure a good practical farmer” and what was “to be done on the Farm



**ROBERT M. VEATCH** (left), Alice E. Biddle, and James K.P. Currin graduated from Corvallis College in 1870 with Bachelor of Science degrees — the college’s first graduating class.

to meet the requirements of the law.” Trustees worried whether the “Course of Studies and the Degrees now Conferred by the College” fully complied with congressional legislation and state laws.<sup>25</sup>

The board of trustees appointed the college’s first professor of military science in 1873, and in keeping with Southern cultural preferences, cadets wore Confederate gray uniforms and matching caps until the campus presidency of John Bloss (1892–1896), who had served in the Union Army. The trustees’ minutes for September 1874 continued to debate religion, quoting from a letter to the school’s “Daily Bulletin” that Corvallis College was “offensively partisan and Sectarian” and that one faculty member “fraudulently” claimed to have a master of arts degree. The trustees responded that the professor — Joseph Emery — held a master of arts degree from Pacific Methodist College and was competent to teach his assigned courses. The charge, therefore, was “an unmitigated misstatement of facts and could have been prompted only by malice.” Although the trustees muted most doctrinal commentary about the college, the Columbia Conference was more assertive, citing in its 1874 session the need for “moral instruction, moral science and philosophy.”<sup>26</sup>

In his first biennial report to the governor, Arnold described the institution’s poverty — indebtedness and “no money and scarcely any resources.” Although the college could do little with the state contribution of \$5,000, it organized literary and scientific departments and enrolled forty-four students during the biennium. There were serious problems with enrollees, however, because state law allowed admission to “any youth sixteen years of age, no other requirements.” As a consequence, many students in the agricultural department were illiterate and therefore unable to complete their courses. The faculty responsible for the departments were Emery (Mathematics), B.J. Hawthorne (Languages), Captain Benjamin Boswell (Military), and Arnold (Physical Science and Moral Science). With no formal training, the president had undertaken soil analysis and experiments with wheat, “the great staple of Oregon.”<sup>27</sup>

In the midst of testy conference and trustee meetings, life at the college continued apace. Arnold arranged for Rev. E.J. Dawme of Salem to deliver a series of scientific lectures, and the college building committee finalized plans for more classroom space. Although still without the railroad-inspired growth of Albany and Eugene in the mid 1870s, Corvallis boasted good warehouses along the Willamette River, excellent mercantile establishments, and “a prosperous college of 150 students.” Promises of development seemed eminent, with plans for a railroad from Corvallis to Yaquina Bay. The completion of that line would save Corvallis merchants as much



**OREGON AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE** commandant and cadets are pictured here in 1892 dressed in Confederate gray uniforms. Blue uniforms replaced gray when John Bloss became president later that year.

as 100 miles in shipments to and from California. The pending completion of the west-side railroad from Portland through Corvallis would provide an alternative to river travel.<sup>28</sup>

Oregon's fledgling agricultural school gained a competitor when the legislature took advantage of the statehood act, which provided seventy-two sections of public land to support a university. Lawmakers coordinated their effort with Eugene's Union University Association to secure a site and to provide a building "of not less than \$50,000." The association achieved its objective in 1876, when the university opened with a president, two college-level faculty, and teachers to oversee a preparatory department. The legislature vested governance to a governor-appointed "Regents of the University." Like the agricultural college, the legislature extended student scholarships to attend the university to each county in the state. In a significant departure from legislative oversight of the agricultural college, however, Section 11 of the 1876 act establishing the university stipulated: "No political or sectarian test shall ever be allowed or applied in the appointment of regents, professors, teachers or employees of the University."<sup>29</sup>

The legislature's decision to site the state university in Eugene placed Corvallis College and its agricultural department in the crosshairs of contentious relations with the state's new major collegiate institution. Jealous that Portland lacked a comparable school, the *Oregonian* complained it would have been better to "have one state educational institution that could support itself instead of two, each struggling for existence." Legislators erred, the newspaper reported, when they used the general fund to sustain the agricultural college, because the land grant should be sufficient to support the school. The problem rested with the legislature's grand bargain designating Eugene home to the state university, Salem the state capitol, and Corvallis the location for the agricultural college.<sup>30</sup> Neither the *Oregonian* nor the legislature was enthusiastic about supporting higher education.

Critics of the state agricultural school directed most of their barbs at its religious affiliation. A letter to the *Oregonian* took issue with a member of the Corvallis College Board of Trustees for arguing that the M.E. Church, South, did not control the college, because everyone knew that the church and its bishops had appointed the reverends Finley and Emery. The same was true for Arnold. "Why," the writer asked, "is it that all the actions of the board of regents, their selection of teachers, etc., must be voted upon by the conference?" Moreover, the college farm was "at best only a good sized vegetable garden." Citizens wanted the state, not a church, to run the school.<sup>31</sup>

In truth, Corvallis College struggled mightily to survive, with the majority of its students in the Primary and Preparatory departments. Of the 169 students enrolled in 1870, only 28 were at the college level. Although the ratio of college-level students increased over the years, the number graduating from the college was very low, reflecting Arnold's report about large numbers of students ill-prepared for college work. Through the 1870s, graduating classes averaged 4.5 students per year. During the 1880s, the numbers increased to an average of 6.6 per year; however, in 1890, there were only 4 students in the graduating class.<sup>32</sup>

Arnold's biennial reports are helpful in understanding the condition of Corvallis College and its agricultural department. The president, whose assessments were blunt, referred to the Morrill Act requirements as a great model for educating students in the agricultural sciences and mechanical arts. His accounts summarize instructional programs and his research with "white soil" and wheat culture. The agricultural college was in crisis in 1880, because lawmakers eliminated the institution's annual appropriation of \$5,000, placing the college's support on interest from the unpredictable

land fund. Arnold worried about the college's limited means and uncertainty about the funds it might expect. Regular funding over several years, he noted, was necessary to undertake significant agriculture experiments.<sup>33</sup> Financially strapped Corvallis College and its agricultural unit were no different from other land-grant institutions in their struggle for funding.

Gov. W.W. Thayer's biennial message to the legislature in 1882 offers a troublesome profile of the respective land grants to the state university and the agricultural college. Of the Eugene university's seventy-two reserved sections, 29,000 acres had been sold, leaving 17,000 remaining. The agricultural college had sold 26,000 of its 90,000 acres, with 64,000 remaining. The university received \$62,000 for its sales, and the agricultural college, \$65,000. The governor reported that property incomes for the two institutions differed because earnings on interest sometimes reflected lower rates. The university's land-grant fund earned \$12,061 for the biennium and the agricultural college \$10,792 — the figures representing both low market prices for land and buyers with questionable credit who failed to come up with cash for their purchases.<sup>34</sup> There would be little stability in support for the agricultural unit until the legislature assumed full control in the late 1880s.

Reflecting exchanges of information with the Commissioner of Agriculture in Washington, D.C., Arnold's biennial reports take on a broader perspective about the function of the agricultural unit at the onset of the 1880s. The Corvallis institution hosted John Minto, one of its chief critics, who addressed students on behalf of the Oregon State Grange and the State Agricultural Society. Minto commended the faculty for their hard work but thought they deserved more support. The college's problem, he believed, could be attributed to "a lack of . . . interest in it as a school of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts." The legislature renewed its \$5,000 biennial appropriation for the agricultural college in its next session and added another \$2,500 to the institution's support because its revenue had "become seriously impaired."<sup>35</sup> Arnold left unsaid anything about the M.E. Church, South's, meager support — the church relied on voluntary "subscriptions" from members to fund the college.

Beyond observations about the college, Arnold reported experiments with grasses, "the only one allowed by our means." On campus, the faculty were unable to enforce the requirement for manual labor because there were no funds "for this purpose." Although the college had met its financial obligations, it needed additional funds to hire another teacher. Arnold emphasized a new pedagogical strategy in his 1884 report, "A Practical Education Based on Science." To implement the model would require three distinct

faculties: scientific and literary, technical studies, and general education. Arnold reminded Oregon legislators that they were obligated to organize the agricultural college on the basis of those three faculties. The president added news from the nation's capital important to the future of the Corvallis school — Congress was considering a bill to establish agricultural experiment stations that would provide \$15,000 to each state for conducting agricultural investigations.<sup>36</sup>

While the Columbia Conference worried about funding new buildings, its minutes through the 1870s and into the 1880s reflect great attention to both education and religion — pledging its “liveliest interest in Corvallis College” — while complaining about the moral harm “wrought by simply educating the mind to the neglect of training the soul.” In the face of its dismal financial situation, the conference continued to praise the college's healthy finances. The catalogue for 1879–1880 listed schools of physics, mathematics, moral science, languages, history and literature, English, and agriculture. At the same time, the conference worried about its jurisdiction over the agricultural department, with a note of desperation evident in the minutes of an 1882 session when it received a Benton County citizens petition asking “to segregate the Agricultural Department from the College.” The conference disagreed that segregating the agricultural department from the college would benefit the county and the interests of education. If the college released the agricultural department to the state, the county would be left with Corvallis College and no agricultural department. Submitting to the petitioners' request would be “Educational suicide,” because the petitioner's central issue resolved “itself into one word, the *church*.”<sup>37</sup> Evident in both the conference and trustees deliberations at this point is a level of anxiety that would soon lead to dramatic changes in control over the agricultural unit.

In the midst of growing concerns about the agricultural department, the trustees asked the legislature in August 1882 to fund a mechanical department, an important component of the Morrill Act. The trustees offered a startling *quid pro quo* — if the legislature provided a mechanical department, they would convey the farm to the state, and the legislature would be asked to accept the property:

*It [the farm] is for educational purposes and such trusts are seldom allowed to fail or die — and therefore it would be [illegible word] for the College to vest its title in the State if thought best. The State would simply hold the title in trust, subject to the same conditions and limitations, and for the same purposes that it is now held by the College.*<sup>38</sup>



**FOLLOWING THE OREGON LEGISLATURE'S** 1885 mandate, Benton County citizens funded the construction of a building for the Agricultural College of the State of Oregon. The Administration Building (now Benton Hall) was open for operation in the fall of 1888.

The trustees' move was the opening round in a series of decisions that would eventually vest control of the agricultural department fully with the state.

Corvallis College faculty and its board of trustees were increasingly sensitive to critics who questioned their management of the agricultural department. Wallis Nash, a British immigrant and soon to be an important figure in guiding the college when it reverted to state control, offended the faculty when he charged in his 1882 book, *Two Years in Oregon*, that the college did "not teach agricultural subjects." The faculty, according to the board of trustees minutes, was indignant, pronouncing the statement "palpably untrue" and "calculated to do harm to the best interests of our college." At its February 1882 meeting, the faculty termed "the statements



false in every particular” and instructed Arnold to publicly correct the misrepresentations.<sup>39</sup>

With the Oregon Legislature circling ever closer to seizing control of the agricultural college, the Columbia Conference and the trustees divided over what to do with the college farm. Meeting in Dayton, Washington Territory, in September 1884, the conference endorsed the board of trustees’ decision to transfer the agricultural farm to the state, declaring, “we have never claimed this property.” If the conference was unable to raise \$25,000 to erect a college building, it directed trustees to ask the legislature to dissolve the compact between “Corvallis College and the State of Oregon to take effect at the close of the present Scholastic year, June 1885.”<sup>40</sup>

The Dayton meeting would prove the *coup de grace* in ending ties between Corvallis College and the state agricultural college. When the conference failed to raise the money, the legislature approved an “Act to confirm the Location of the State Agricultural College at Corvallis, and to provide for the Maintenance and Government thereof” (approved February 11, 1885). The legislation required Benton County citizens to fund and erect a building to cost no less than \$25,000. The law established a thirteen-member board of regents to oversee the college, with responsibility for supervising the curriculum in accord with the federal mandate. Section 13 of the act directed Corvallis College “to relinquish to the State the control and management of the State agricultural college to take effect at the time and in the manner provided in this act.”<sup>41</sup> In effect, the state would assume control of what Corvallis College trustees referred to as the agricultural department.

When the Columbia Conference met in Albany in September 1885, it reversed course, declaring the 1884 proceedings “null and void” and rescinding all resolutions to dissolve its jurisdiction over the agricultural department. The conference asked the legislature in September 1886 to restore the relationship between Corvallis College and the “State Agricultural College,” indicating that only a bare quorum of conference members was present at the Dayton meeting. Because the vote was four to three to transfer the agricultural department to the state, the conference asked lawmakers to reconsider their decision to take control of the agricultural department.<sup>42</sup>

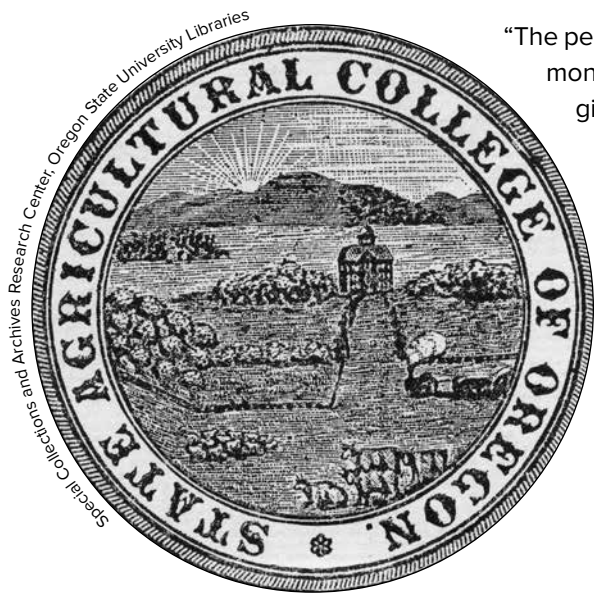
The board of trustees added its voice in March 1887 in an effort to reclaim the endowment and property of the agricultural department. They argued, evidence to the contrary, that the Dayton meeting transferring the agricultural college to the state was “unauthorized,” as was the decision to deed the

college farm to the state. Trustees argued that they had never consented to end the contract between the state and the college. That consent, agreed to at “an illegal special meeting of this Board . . . was now void, and is hereby withdrawn.” The board approved the motion eleven to five, with A. Cauthorn, Jas. A. Cauthorn, M. Jacobs, J.M. Applewhite, and Arnold opposed. The trustees then appointed a committee “to assert, maintain, protect, or defend in the courts” its rights to Corvallis College.<sup>43</sup>

Four days removed from the meeting, a Corvallis resident published a letter in the *Oregonian* documenting the relationship between the M.E. Church, South, and the agricultural college. After retelling the conflicting resolutions of the Columbia Conference and its board of trustees, the writer cited widespread disgust in Corvallis over the board of trustees’ decision to void its agreement with the state. “The indignation here is great. The majority of the board was burnt in effigy last night.” While citizens had labored hard for the college, they viewed the trustees’ latest decision as an attempt to delay the obvious: “Nobody doubts much the ultimate defeat of the church.” If the trustees’ move had any legal standing, the writer concluded, “it is by virtue of irregularities in the proceedings of its own Agents.” The greater question was the legislature’s power to “convey a state institution in perpetuity to any church.”<sup>44</sup>

Critics abounded, with one Corvallis citizen accusing Arnold of misleading the legislature in his biennial reports. In a letter to the *Oregonian*, the anonymous writer described the college’s curriculum as unpretentious — “schools of physics, mathematics, moral science, ancient languages, modern language, history and literature, engineering and agriculture.” This was a charade, the notion that three teachers were responsible for “this voluminous and extensive work.” The writer mocked “Reverend Emery,” a preacher for twenty years, who was teaching stock breeding to students. Oregon “needed an agricultural school, but it should be like the State university — nonsectarian.”<sup>45</sup>

Because the new board of regents did not take full control of the agricultural college until the summer of 1888, opponents of Corvallis College continued to belabor the M.E. Church, South, for attempting to rescind its 1884 resolution. The college was “a classical and literary institution,” an anonymous letter to the *Oregonian* charged. The school had a competent scholar as president, but one who knows nothing about agriculture. With construction of a building on the farm nearly completed, the future of a true agricultural college seemed bright. Corvallis citizens resented the Columbia Conference’s rearguard action to reclaim management of the college:



**STATE SUPPORT** for the Oregon Agricultural College was bolstered by a joint legislative committee visit in 1889. Pictured here is the Oregon Agricultural College seal in 1889.

“The people will never consent to pay their money to a college that is run by a religious sect.” The Hatch Bill working its way through Congress, with an annual appropriation of \$15,000 for agricultural experiment stations, made it incumbent to “rescind sectarian control.”<sup>46</sup>

The murky legal fight between the M.E. Church, South, and the State of Oregon continued long after the legislature took control of the college farm. Disgruntled Columbia Conference members brought suit against the state, charging that the transfer of property was illegal. Circuit Court Judge R.S. Bean determined in January 1888 that the agricultural college had always been vested with the state, and that the M.E. Church, South,

had relinquished control over its holdings in 1885. Bean dismissed the case as without merit. The Columbia Conference appealed Bean’s decision to the Oregon Supreme Court, which determined that the deed transferring the farm to the state was illegal, because the decision belonged to its oversight body, the Columbia Conference, not the board of trustees. The plaintiffs, who had put up money to purchase the farm, therefore deserved recompense.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the legal setback, Gov. Sylvester Pennoyer’s message to the Oregon Legislature in 1889 was optimistic — the agricultural college was doing well and deserved the state’s support to purchase land for a larger farm. With its \$15,000 annual endowment for an agricultural experiment station and frugal management, the Corvallis school, like the university in Eugene, should be prosperous, “without being a perpetual pensioner upon the taxpayers of the state.” The lawsuit against the state’s possession of the agricultural college, the governor insisted, was “entirely without foundation.” Since he had accepted the buildings and grounds on behalf of the state, Pennoyer reasoned that the property belonged to the state. Aggrieved parties would have to appeal to the legislature, and if there

were justice in their demands, “the legislature should grant it; if there be none, it should deny it.”<sup>48</sup>

A joint legislative committee visited the college in early 1889 and returned to Salem convinced that the agricultural college deserved support once the legal claims were cleared. Since the state had ceased funding Corvallis College because it no longer controlled the agricultural department, the *Oregonian* reported that the college had “dwindled to a mere handful of students and is on the downward road to certain decay.” The college had been plundering “the State treasury for sectarian purposes in direct violation of the State constitution,” and so little had been accomplished that farmers regarded “the institution as little more than a farce.”<sup>49</sup> The newspaper charged that the behavior of the church was “so dishonest and perverse” that two of its members, Rev. J.R.N. Bell and Sen. Thomas E. Cauthorn, had abandoned it in disgust. The *Oregonian* was confident that the legislature would settle the small claims for the farm. “The state is not to be speculated on in that way.”<sup>50</sup>

The litigated world of the agricultural college extended into the 1890s, long after the Oregon Supreme Court remanded the case back to Benton County. Remnant members of the Columbia Conference again brought suit in the county against the agricultural college’s board of regents to recover the original farm. When church representatives won in the county circuit court in 1892, the regents appealed to the Oregon Supreme Court, which reversed the circuit court’s decision. Oregon’s highest court found that Corvallis College had the legal right to convey the land to the state, and that the agricultural college’s board of regents was legally empowered to accept the title.

*Neither the Methodist Church South, or its members, or any of them, or Corvallis College have any title to said land or right to the possession thereof.*

*It is therefore considered, ordered and decreed that the complaint herein be and the same hereby is dismissed.*

In a brief report on the litigation, the *Corvallis Gazette* brought finality to the issue: “This is the celebrated Corvallis and M.E. church south case and involved the title to the state agricultural college grounds in this city.”<sup>51</sup>

With governance shifting from sectarian to non-sectarian control, the mid 1880s marked a crossroads for Oregon’s agricultural college. From this point forward, legislative mandates guided hiring and firing, curricular guidelines, and counsel for college administrators. For Arnold and the faculty, the new regime would mean more watchful oversight of college affairs, including its top administrator. In the following decades, the board of regents would

keep a careful eye on spending. In addition to the president, other personnel made the transition to the new institutional oversight, some of them faculty who had sided with the state during the difficult days after the legislature assumed control of the college.

The Corvallis school would continue to grow and mature into the next century, its faculty gradually assuming the hues of a legitimate agricultural college. Federal government largesse, however, not state support, spurred most of the college's development during the next two decades. The Hatch Act was critical, providing the college with regular financial support and accelerating exchanges of information with other land-grant institutions. The increasing contacts with the outside world broadened the cultural and political worlds of the relatively isolated Corvallis campus. With the completion of a transcontinental railroad to Portland in 1883 and the state's rapidly growing population, the state legislature slowly increased support for the University of Oregon, Oregon Agricultural College, and the normal schools in Monmouth and Ashland.

Sectarian matters aside, the Columbia Conference and its board of trustees were ill-suited to sustain and manage a state agricultural college. The conference and the land-grant college harbored different missions — Corvallis College and its oversight bodies served religious purposes while the objectives of its agricultural department were clearly secular, "to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes." Corvallis College faculty, dominated by members of the M.E. Church, South, strived to provide a comprehensive curriculum, but their courses veered toward classical education. With the state-appointed board of regents guiding the Agricultural College of the State of Oregon in 1888, its faculty more than doubled, its curriculum differing dramatically from that of Corvallis College. In the college's first year as a public school, Grant Covell joined the faculty as its first engineering professor and Margaret Snell accepted an appointment to oversee the Department of Household Economy and Hygiene (the agricultural college's first female faculty). The Agricultural College of Oregon had moved through what Roger Geiger described as "a long and arduous process" and achieved a semblance of stability. John Bloss, who became president in 1892, commented that 1888 marked a milestone in the college's history, a point in time when it began "to come into harmony with the purpose of its existence."<sup>52</sup>

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## NOTES

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1. *Oregonian*, August 12, 1862; Roger L. Williams, *The Origins of Federal Support for Higher Education: George W. Atherton and the Land-Grant College Movement* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 34–41.
2. Linda P.B. Katehi, “Innovation and the Mission of the Land Grant University,” *The People’s Vanguard of Davis*, March 2, 2015, <http://www.davisvanguard.org/2015/03/innovation-and-the-mission-of-the-land-grant-university/>, (accessed December 14, 2015); John R. Campbell, *Reclaiming a Lost Heritage: Land-Grant and Other Higher Education Initiatives for the Twenty-First Century* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1998), 17.
3. Clyde A. Milner II, Carol A. O’Connor, and Martha A. Sandweiss, eds., *The Oxford History of the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 607, 215; Paul S. Boyer, ed., *The Oxford Companion to United States History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 34; Roger L. Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education: Learning and Culture from the Founding to World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 282, 297.
4. Milner, et al., eds., *The Oxford History of the American West*, 607, 215; Boyer, ed., *The Oxford Companion to United States History*, 34.
5. Historical Note, Columbia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1866–1893, Collection [hereafter, Columbia Conference Collection], Oregon State University Special Collections and Archives, Corvallis, Oregon [hereafter SCARC]; General Commission on Archives and History: The United Methodist Church, <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/the-slavery-question-and-civil-war/world-war-and-more-change> (accessed February 18, 2016).
6. General Commission on Archives and History: The United Methodist Church; Historical Note, Columbia Conference Collection, SCARC.
7. Historical Note, Columbia Conference Collection, SCARC; John R. Thelin, *A History of Higher Education*, 2nd edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 76–77. The land-grant origin of present-day Kansas State University was linked to a defunct Methodist college when it opened as Kansas State Agricultural College in 1863. See Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education*, 302.
8. *Oregonian*, March 7, 1863, April 23, 1863; “An Act to accept the proposal of the Congress of the United States granting lands to the state of Oregon for agricultural colleges,” *General Statutes of Oregon* (1862), 60–61; Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education*, 284–85.
9. Earle D. Ross, *The Land-Grant Idea at Iowa State College* (Ames: Iowa State College Press, 1958), 34–36; *General Laws of the State of Oregon* (1868), 40–41 and 430–31; *Oregonian*, April 9, 1864, October 3, and December 28, 1868,.
10. John E. Smith, *Corvallis College* (Corvallis: 1953), 5–9; *Oregonian*, April 21, 1893. For a brief account of Bellinger’s career, see Oliver Tatom, “Charles Bellinger (1839–1905),” *The Oregon Encyclopedia*, [http://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/bellinger\\_charles\\_1839\\_1905\\_/#.Vm8ISb\\_sdKk](http://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/bellinger_charles_1839_1905_/#.Vm8ISb_sdKk) (accessed December 14, 2015).
11. John B. Horner, “History of Oregon State College, 1865–1907,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 31:1 (March 1930): 42–43; J. G. Flook, handwritten note, “Resolved that a

select committee of three be appointed" September 30, 1868, Benton County Historical Society [hereafter BCHS]; David Peterson del Mar, "Fourteenth Amendment," *The Oregon Encyclopedia*, [http://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/14th\\_amendment/#.VkDsugjlvA4](http://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/14th_amendment/#.VkDsugjlvA4) (accessed December 14, 2015).

12. Columbia Conference Collection, October 26, 1866, and August 25, 1867, SCARC; Corvallis College, Articles of Incorporation, SCARC.

13. Columbia Conference Collection, Fourth Session, September 1, 1869, SCARC.

14. The trustees' records did not list any other full-time faculty salaries. Journal of the Board of Trustees of Corvallis College, August 22 and October 31, 1868, Board of Trustees Records, 1868–1891, RG 033 [hereafter Board of Trustees Records], SCARC.

15. The title "agricultural college" is a misnomer, because Corvallis College officials commonly used the term "department" when referring to the courses it taught. President Benjamin Arnold used Corvallis State Agricultural College on the title page of the annual catalogue. By the late 1870s, however, Corvallis College returned to the title page of the catalogue and appeared on college diplomas. Before the state assumed control of the school in 1885, some version of State Agricultural College was used in various reports. Beginning in 1889, the *Corvallis Gazette* referred to Oregon Agricultural College, and in the next decade it served as the regular reference for the institution. See Smith, *Corvallis College*, 43.

16. Board of Trustees Records, September 1 and December 13, 1969, SCARC; and *Fourth Annual Catalogue of Corvallis College, 1868–1869* (Salem, 1969), 16.

17. Columbia Conference Collection, September 9, 1870, SCARC.

18. *Acts and Resolutions of the Legislature of the State of Oregon, Passed at the Sixth Regular Session, 1870*, 17–20; Board of Trustees Records, October 29 and November 12, 1870, SCARC; *Messages and Documents: Report on Agricultural College Lands (1870)*, 21–26.

19. Circular of State Agricultural College, March 1, 1873, Board of Trustees Records, SCARC.

20. Frederick G. Young, "Financial History of the State of Oregon — IV, Part III, Public Expenditures," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 11:3 (September 1910): 296–97; Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 72.

21. *Oregonian*, October 14, 1871. The *Oregonian* quoted at length an article appearing in the *Willamette Farmer*. For a brief biography of Minto, see William L. Lang, "John Minto (1822–1915)," *The Oregon Encyclopedia*, [http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/minto\\_john\\_1822\\_1915\\_/#.VRWpvNjwuic](http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/minto_john_1822_1915_/#.VRWpvNjwuic) (accessed December 14, 2015).

22. National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Willamette Falls Navigation Canal and Locks," <https://savingplaces.org/places/willamette-falls-navigation-canal-and-locks#.VjfMugjluOU> (accessed November 2, 2015); Chronological History of Oregon State University, OSU Libraries-University Archives [hereafter Chronological History], [http://scar.library.oregonstate.edu/chronology/chron\\_head.html](http://scar.library.oregonstate.edu/chronology/chron_head.html) (accessed December 16, 2015); Benton County Historical Society Timeline, <http://www.bentoncountymuseum.org/index.php/research/benton-county-history> (accessed December 16, 2015); *Oregonian*, April 8, 1867; *Willamette Farmer*, April 26, 1873.

23. Biographical Note, Guide to the Benjamin L. Arnold Collection, SCARC.

24. Biennial Report of the Agricultural College, August 12, 1872, RG 013, subgroup 12, box 9, SCARC; *Catalogue of Corvallis College, 1871–1872* (Salem, 1872), 20.

25. Board of Trustees Records, October 18, 1873 and June 15, 1874, SCARC.

26. Chronological History; Board of Trustees Records, September 24, 1874, SCARC; Columbia Conference Collection, Ninth Session, September 14, 1874, SCARC.

27. "Biennial Report of the Agricultural College, 1874," RG 013, subgroup 12, box 9, SCARC. The faculty's teaching responsibilities are stunning, with Professor B. J. Hawthorne responsible for eight classes every day: Latin

(22 students); Latin (19 students); German (10 students); Greek (3 students); French (7 students); and English Grammar (17 students).

28. *Oregonian*, December 15, 1873.

29. *General Laws of the State of Oregon Enacted by the Legislative Assembly at the Ninth Regular Session, 1876* (Salem, Oregon, 1876), 52–63.

30. *Oregonian*, March 14, 1876.

31. *Oregonian*, May 24, 1876; *Eleventh Annual Catalogue of Corvallis Agricultural College, 1875–1876* (Salem, 1876), 8–13.

32. These figures are from several issues of the *General Catalogue*, but especially from the *Annual Catalogue of the State Agricultural College of the State of Oregon for 1889–1890*, Oregon State Agricultural College (1890), 30–32.

33. *Biennial Reports of the State Agricultural College, 1876 and 1880*, SCARC. Until the state took control, there is no indication whether the students were graduates of the Agricultural Department or the College.

34. *Biennial Message of Governor W. W. Thayer* (1882), 19–20, and 23–29, Oregon State Archives, Salem.

35. *Biennial Report of the State Agricultural College, 1882*, SCARC; and *General Laws of the State of Oregon* (1882), 26. Minto's appearance was related to his interest in the Corvallis enterprise as a secular school of agriculture and mechanical arts. Moreover, the M.E. Church, South, was struggling mightily to support Corvallis College by 1882, and Minto was well aware of the weaknesses of the agricultural department.

36. *Biennial Report of the State Agricultural College, 1884*, SCARC.

37. Columbia Conference Collection, September 18, 1875, September 15, 1876, and circa. 1878, 1881, and Appendix to the 18th Session, c. 1882, SCARC.

38. Board of Trustees Records, August 18, 1882, SCARC.

39. Board of Trustees Records, "Minutes," February 3, 1882, Book 1, RG 32, box 3, SCARC.

40. Columbia Conference Collection, September 3, 1884, and ca. 1884–1885, SCARC. The conference minutes sometimes refer to

the board of trustees and the regents. The board of trustees initially thought the conference's decision "would be improper at this time." On the motion of Reverend J.R.N. Bell, however, the board agreed to follow the mandate of the conference. See Board of Trustees, January 29, 1885.

41. *The Laws of Oregon and the Resolutions and Memorials of the Thirteenth Regular Session of the Legislative Assembly* (1885), 10–19. The House vote on the Senate bill to situate the agricultural college in Corvallis was 56 to 4. See Biennial Session of the Oregon Legislature *Journal of the House* (1885), 286–87.

42. Columbia Conference Collection, September 1, 1885 and September 18, 1886, SCARC.

43. Board of Trustees Records, March 24, 1887, SCARC.

44. *Oregonian*, March 28, 1887. An *Oregonian* editorial the next day supported the argument that the legislature did not have "authority to bestow the State Agricultural endowment upon a sectarian school in perpetuity."

45. *Oregonian*, September 10, 1884.

46. *Oregonian*, December 22, 1887.

47. *Oregonian*, January 30, 1888, and December 7, 1888.

48. Biennial Message of Governor Sylvester Pennoyer to the Legislative Assembly, *Journal of the House of the Oregon Legislative Assembly, Fifteenth Regular Session, 1889* (Salem: Frank C. Baker, State Printer, 1889), Appendix A.

49. Report of Special Committee on Corvallis College, Fifteenth Regular Session of the Oregon Legislature (Salem: Frank C. Baker, State Printer, 1889), copy in Pubs, SCARC, 1–10d.

50. *Oregonian*, February 12, 1889.

51. Oregon Supreme Court, October 3, 1892, *Joseph Liggett et al., v. W.S. Ladd et al.*, no. 4473, box 148; *Corvallis Gazette*, October 7, 1892.

52. *Biennial Report of the Oregon State Agricultural College* (1889), 5–7, SCARC; (1893), 14–15; Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education*, 297.